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Spring and Summer Management of Forage Crops

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AGRONOMY NOTES SOILS • CROPS

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SPRING AND SUMMER MANAGEMENT OF FORAGE CROPS

The late summer and early fall drought affected forage crops throughout the state. What can be done this spring and summer about the situation?

Established Stands

1. Examine stands carefully and make sure they are thinned out. Chances are they have been thinned some, but mainly there is a reduction in plant vigor. These conditions have been brought on by the drought, low fertility, and close, late grazing or hay harvesting.

2. Where stands are lost or substantially reduced, Korean or Kole lespedeza, Ladino or white clover, Alsike, or red clover may be drilled in with a grain drill, seeded and tramped in by livestock, or seeded on "honey-comb-freeze." (When using the last method, increase seeding rate 50 percent or more because of reduced chance of plant survival.)

3. Where a good stand of grass is still present, renovate as described in Univ. of Ky. Coop. Ext. Serv. Leaflet 228, "Put Legumes Back in Grass Pastures." Make the seeding by March 15. For each day beyond March 15, the amount of stand for this year is decreased about 2 percent. Do not apply nitrogen with this system of renovation. It stimulates grass and crowds out the new legumes.

4. Topdress fertilize good stands as soon as possible. Stands with less than 25 percent legumes will need supplemental nitrogen for high yields. Stands with more than 25 percent legumes should produce enough nitrogen to give top yields.

5. Use summer annual grasses. Piper sudan is still giving top results. Planting costs and what to do with the land following the sudan are problems;

therefore, this crop is and possibly always will be an emergency measure.

The best way to provide for emergencies such as a drought is to plan a long-time, 12-month forage program. One or more feed-use emergencies occur each year. Unless farmers have a good supply of feed in storage each year, they sacrifice income from meat and milk production or lower livestock prices. One solution is to store hay and grass silage made from surplus grasses and legumes. Harvests should be made early for quality and yield. We'd like to hear from you on the matter of trench-stored grass-legume silage put up and "capped" until an emergency. How long will it keep? What is the longest time silage has been stored under these conditions in your area, and what were the results when it was fed?

6. Reduce herd size by selling culls, or buy supplemental feed to get through the emergency period.

New Seedings

1. Examine the stands to see if they have been reduced greatly or whether the main problem is reduction in plant vigor.

2. Where the stand is reduced greatly, either disk it up and start over or thicken it. Disk a stand up as early as possible and make the seeding by March 20 in western Kentucky and a week later elsewhere. When thickening a stand, grain-drill the seed in and manage as for a new seeding. For example, if alfalfa has been over-drilled, wait on the first cutting until the new seeding is in full bloom (about July 4-10).

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